DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 216 652 HE 015 120

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TITLE The Academic Dean.
INSTITUTION American Association of Univ. Administrators, Washington, D.C.; ERIC Clearinghouse on Higher Education, Washington, D.C.
SPONS AGENCY National Inst. of Education (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE 81
CONTRACT 400-77-0073
NOTE 8p.
AVAILABLE FROM American Association of University Administrators, 1000 Vermont Ave., N.W., Washington, DC 20005 ($1.00).
JOURNAL CIT Administrator's Update; v3 n2 Fall 1981

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Academic Deans; *Administrator Attitudes; Administrator Role; Conflict Resolution; Employment Experience; Higher Education; Job Satisfaction; Problem Solving; *Role Conflict; *Teacher Administrator Relationship

ABSTRACT

The role of the academic dean, role conflicts, and the occupational experiences and performance of deans are considered. Role conflict for academic deans is related to clashing constituencies, role ambiguity, lack of correspondence between organization requirements and the personalities of incumbent deans, changing organizational needs over time, and historical trends in the definition of the deanship. Less than half the deans are evaluated annually, usually by presidents, chancellors, vice-presidents, or provosts. While satisfactions of deans have been reported with respect to the raising of academic standards at an institution, contributing to curriculum development, and hiring qualified faculty, dissatisfactions pertain to situations in which the dean is the initiator of conflict, the dean is the defendant in an attack on the administration, or the dean is the conciliator. It is suggested that the role of the dean needs to be clarified with respect to planning, evaluation, resource allocation, and other administrative functions. Knowing what attracts individuals to the deanship and how the balance of satisfactions and dissatisfactions leads to the resignation of deans after a time would also be valuable. Mechanisms that would enable deans to maintain their scholarly interests so that they may return to teaching later in their careers may be important, along with research on the wisdom of retaining deans in their administrative positions. Since teaching is the primary activity overseen by deans, it is necessary to know more about how they might manage resources of all kinds (including symbolic resources) to stimulate and maintain teaching excellence in their academic units. (SW)

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ED216652

ADMINISTRATOR'S UPDATE

FALL 1981

Volume 3
Number 2

American Association of
University Administrators

ERIC Clearinghouse on
Higher Education

THE ACADEMIC DEAN

by

Lee H. Bowker

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The Academic Dean

By Lee H. Bowker

Although the college deanship has a sixteenth century ecclesiastical precursor in the Jesuit prefect of studies (Dupont 1956), the first general dean in an American educational institution was not appointed until 1870, when President Eliot of Harvard created a deanship to relieve him of "the immediate charge of the college administration" (Ward 1934, p. 103). In addition to taking over presidential functions, deans absorbed duties previously assigned to the registrar in some institutions (Mobberley and Wicke 1962). Finally, they were created outright to serve as the chief officer of professional schools such as those of medicine and law (Corson 1960). Student personnel work was mixed with academic administration until Harvard developed a student affairs deanship in 1890 (Brubacher and Rudy 1958), and there still is a heavy component of student personnel work in the job descriptions of many small college academic deans today.

THE ROLE OF THE ACADEMIC DEAN

Various authors (see, for example Corson 1960; Dearing 1963; Dill 1980; Hanzeli 1966; Henderson 1957; Latta 1970; McGannon 1973; Miller 1974; Mobberley and Wicke 1962; Robin 1974) have attempted to define the role of the academic dean. Like the blind men and the elephant, they tend to be limited to that portion of the beast immediately at hand. Perhaps the most general description of the role of the academic dean has been developed by Dill (1980) from the work of Barnard (1938) and Simon (1974). In Dill's conception, deans have three major duties: (1) to integrate the interests of various constituencies into a common sense of purpose, including goal setting and institutional planning; (2) to create incentives from existing resources to stimulate new and continuing contributions and commitments to the institution; and (3) to maximize the institution's efficiency in transforming contributions and commitments of all kinds into educational products and services. It is difficult to be more specific than this without losing generality because the role requirements of the academic deanship vary by institutional characteristics such as sponsorship, size, and function as well as by idiosyncratic factors such as the preferences of the presidents and other administrators to whom deans report.

Role Conflicts in Deaning

Empirical studies of academic deans in junior colleges (Schultz 1962; Todd 1965; Verbeke 1966), liberal arts colleges (Rasmussen 1978), and professional schools within large universities (Kapel and Dejnozka 1979; Otis and Caragonne 1979; Stanford 1979) have consistently identified a high degree of disparity in the perception of deans' actual role performance and their ideal role performance among faculty members, department chairs, student leaders, presidents, and the deans themselves. For example, a national study of education deans and related central administrators, department chairs, and faculty members by Kapel and Dejnozka (1979) revealed considerable differences in perceptions of the role of the dean. Differential perceptions were strong on the dimensions of "personnel and fiscal affairs" and "recruitment of minorities" and modest on "rewarding faculty" and "outside professional activities." Faculty and (to a lesser extent) departmental chairs were less likely than deans and central administrators to view the dean's role as including heavy involvement in general administrative and personnel matters or as sometimes requiring line officer rather than collegial behavior. Relative consensus existed for three remaining dimensions: "outside relations," "evaluation: people and programs," and "monitoring: people and programs."

General commentaries on the academic deanship recognize the phenomenon of role conflict in the deanship when they refer to the dean as a "marginal man" (Nudd 1961) or to the "January aspect" of the academic deanship (Powers, Rainsford, and Arceneaux 1977).

A dean who is caught between opposing groups is usually going to offend one of them, no matter what decision is made, and this double bind dilemma can have severe psychological consequences over the

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years. Otis and Caragonne (1979) found that faculty problems such as conflicts over objectives were second only to budget matters as sources of pressure influencing the decision to resign from social work deanships.

Role conflict among deans can be seen in a number of different perspectives. In addition to the double bind caused by clashing constituencies, role conflict can be analyzed in terms of role ambiguity, lack of correspondence between organizational requirements and the personalities of incumbent deans, changing organizational needs over time, and historical trends in the definition of the deanship. For example, Gideonse (1976) argues that successful deans must have structural, personality elements that parallel organizational requirements. Rasmussen (1978) points out that different styles of leadership may be perceived as necessary for institutional success at different periods in the history of an institution. Dill (1980, p. 273) finds that deans have been drifting toward an "ill-defined 'middle' of academic administration" in which they "are sometimes little more than spectators in the campus power game."

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Taken together, these studies and commentaries suggest that deans in many institutions are more like foremen than top management. Caught between conflicting constituencies, they must be careful about not only what they say, but in what setting they say it. A satisfactory resolution to the dilemma is unlikely to be found by deans in larger institutions. For deans in smaller institutions, where there are no subunits of higher rank than departments and programs, success in minimizing role conflict is most likely to be achieved by capturing the essence of the common identity and purpose of the institution and then tying one's role performance as closely as possible to that higher communal purpose. The reason this strategy is not likely to be successful in larger institutions is because there is no necessary consensus on purposes and goals in these institutions between central administrators and either the faculty or administrators of internal schools and colleges. Although they have certain commonalities of interests, they may also work at cross purposes on a number of significant issues.

THE OCCUPATIONAL EXPERIENCES OF DEANS

Turnover among academic deans seems to be fairly consistent regardless of institutional characteristics. Data from professional schools (Abramson and Moss 1977; DiNapoli 1977), junior colleges (Anderson 1973), and four-year colleges and universities in the United States (Bowker 1978; Haas 1956) and Canada (Konrad 1980) show a range of 4½ to 5¾ years in the length of the subjects' current tenure as dean. This understates the total tenure of deans since the subjects continued on as deans after their participation in the studies.

Deans generally rate their own institutions as "good" on a variety of dimensions when compared with similar institutions. These dimensions include the quality of the student body, faculty-student relations, the intellectual environment, and the availability of teaching resources.

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Faculty members evaluate deans, often sitting on specialized review committees, in fewer than a third of the institutions. Advice is much more common than evaluation, and nearly all deans receive advice from faculty committees on curriculum and policy, three-quarters on promotion and tenure, and just over half on the appointment of department chairs or division heads (Bowker 1982).

Satisfactions

Most deans are rather satisfied with their careers (Bowker 1978; Konrad 1980; Latta and Hartung 1970;). Gould (1964) reports that the three most commonly mentioned job satisfactions by a national sample of academic deans were (1) observing a rise in institutional academic standards, (2) playing a part in curriculum development, and (3) hiring highly qualified faculty and noting their contributions to institutional tone. In a more recent national sample of deans having jurisdiction over the social sciences, the deans were found to consider themselves as very or fairly successful in relation to comparable professors in their own institution and in comparison with all members of their scholarly discipline nationally. Their subjective, comparative salary ratings were somewhat lower (Bowker 1978), which supports Dill's (1980) observation that monetary incentives in higher education are rarely used to encourage administrative excellence to the same extent that they are used to motivate scholarly excellence. Dill recommended that "some greater attention to administrative inducements may be in order" (p. 282).

Dissatisfactions

Balanced against these satisfactions are the stresses and disappointments of the dean's work. Feltner and Goodsell (1972) see the deanship as pivotal in three forms of conflict: (1) those in which the dean is the initiator of conflict, (2) those in which the dean is the defendant in an attack on the administration of the institution, and (3) those in which the dean is the conciliator in a conflict between two other elements of the campus community. In these conflicts, deans who have an unrealistically high opinion of their power and influence may suffer severe stress (Ryan 1980). Any attempt to manipulate academic inducements in order to motivate faculty to

improve performance is bound to violate the atomistic tradition of faculty life (Dill 1980). Caplow and McGee (1958) described problem resolution as occurring through "a kind of lawlessness, consisting of vague and incomplete rules and ambiguous and uncodified procedures" (pp. 206) and authority as being "allowed to roll free and . . . taken into whatever hands are capable of exercising it" (p. 207) Their description is as true of higher education today as it was in the 1950s. Professional goal achievement and high job satisfaction among

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deans occur in the face of role conflict and ambiguity, a tradition of faculty individualism and self-government, shifting and ill-defined power configurations, and a paucity of resources that might be used to reward individuals who have made meritorious contributions to the achievement of institutional goals.

THE OCCUPATIONAL PERFORMANCE OF DEANS

The complexity of the dean's job is related to the span of control exercised. The mean number of full-time equivalent faculty supervised by a dean in an American survey of academic deans was 179, and the range was four to 825. A small number of deans who supervised very large units pulled the mean up from the median of 105 faculty. The average dean supervised 14 departments and rated three of them as outstanding, seven as good, three as fair, and one as inferior (Bowker 1978). Konrad's (1980) Canadian study found a smaller number of departments under the average dean's span of control, nine for those deans whose faculty were departmentalized. The Canadian deans were assisted by approximately five professional staff members (assistant and associate deans and administrative assistants) and four clerical employees.

As the chief academic officer of the school or college unit, deans receive numerous complaints and are asked to solve a wide variety of problems in the institution. These problems include matters related to funding and budgeting, faculty personnel, classroom facilities and other kinds of teaching supports, student and faculty morale, and securing the resources necessary to carry out administrative responsibilities (Abramson and Moss 1977; Bowker 1982b; Konrad 1980; Otis and Caragonne 1979). Students join faculty and other administrators in bringing problems and complaints to the attention of the dean, particulalry those concerning inadequate teaching, grades, degree or program requirements, and the range of course offerings (Bowker 1978). When the complaints or problems require cooperative action between the dean and others, persuasion is the major tool that must be used to achieve consensus before action can be taken (Gould 1964). For this reason, decisions are unlikely to be made on a purely substantive basis. Cyphert and Zimpher (1978) found that less than a quarter of their sample of education deans reported that their decisions were purely substantive. Most of these deans felt they mixed substantive and political

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considerations in their decision-making processes. One of the outcomes of balancing substantive and political considerations is that deans are much more likely to allocate resources to maintain outstanding programs or to upgrade good programs than to improve fair or inferior programs (Bowker 1978).

Personal Use of Time

Haas (1956) found committee service, student personnel work, curriculum functions, and the supervision of faculty to be the major demands on the dean's time. Nearly a decade later, Gould (1964) identified routine administrative duties as most demanding of administrative time, followed by faculty relations and morale, committee work, faculty recruitment, and student counseling. Anderson (1973) found routine administrative work to be the major category of time use in junior colleges, just as Gould had for college and university deans.

Deans do more than administrate. They may also teach, continue their research activities, and keep up in their disciplines. Canadian deans were found by Konrad (1980) to spend an average of more than nine hours per week in professional reading. Most of them were currently engaged in research; more than a third were the official advisors of students; and nearly four-fifths had taught at least one course in the previous year.

American deans appear to be somewhat less likely than Canadian deans to be involved in extra-administrative activities. Arden (1967, 1969) found that although most institutions had a provision for deans to be engaged in research and scholarship, few deans actually were able to free up time to do so. He recommended that deans be forced to take a summer off for research and scholarship every third or fourth year as a way of keeping active in their fields. This recommendation gains support from the finding by Otis and Caragonne (1979) that inability to pursue one's own professional goals was a major reason for the resignation of social work deans.

In a recent national sample of American academic deans, it was found that half the deans did not expect to teach at all in the coming year. Those deans who did expect to teach projected an average of one course per semester (Bowker 1982c). There is by no means a consensus on the value of a dean's continuing to teach courses. Lyle (1963) and Enarson (1962) both argue against it, holding that teaching by deans is a waste of their administrative talents, which are in great demand. Keeping up in one's field, a common justification for

the teaching of deans, might be more efficiently accomplished by giving the dean released time for professional reading (Lyle, 1963). It makes sense to assume that teaching deans would be more supportive of the teaching enterprise than nonteaching deans. However, Bowker (1982c) found that none of a group of measures of deans' support of teaching was significantly related to the scope of the deans' projected teaching activities in the coming year.

Encouraging Excellence in Teaching

Deans are strongly supportive of teaching in their verbal behavior. This support may be expressed in hiring, promoting, tenuring, and evaluating faculty (Bowker 1980; Seldin and Wakin 1974) as well as in allocating funds for the support of teaching and teaching-related activities (Bowker 1980). Teaching excellence can also be encouraged symbolically, which is what occurs when deans openly spend more time with the liveliest-minded faculty members than those who are less able (Gould 1964) or make awards to outstanding faculty on the basis of excellence in teaching rather than scholarly productivity.

The national study of deans conducted by the Institutional Context Task Force of the American Sociological Association's Undergraduate Teaching Projects was matched with parallel samples of sociology faculty members and department chairs (Bowker 1978). These samples made it possible to compare the perceptions of deans, chairs, and faculty on the availability of resources and rewards for teaching and other faculty activities. It was found that deans and faculty agreed on matters related to research and publication, but that deans indicated a greater availability of resources and rewards for teaching than faculty members did, with department chairs generally falling in between. Bowker (1982a) interprets these differential perceptions as representing miscommunication from deans to faculty members and recommends that deans should carefully examine institutional policies to discover ways in which support for excellence in teaching is subtly undermined. The importance of dean-faculty communication has been emphasized by many writers, including Bachman (1968), Conant (1967), DeVane (1968), Golemon (n.d), and Gould (1964), but the lack of comprehensive data from fields other than sociology makes it difficult to evaluate the current condition of dean-faculty communication on teaching or other activities in academic institutions.

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CONCLUSION

The existing literature on academic deans is spotty at best. Personal observations abound, but there are few careful empirical studies of representative samples of deans. The only serious proposal to carry out an extensive research program on the deanship is limited to deans of education (Culbertson 1980), but this proposal could be adopted for use with a wider range of deanships. Judging from the work carried out to date on deans by social scientists, there are four problem areas that should be considered in any future applied research designed to provide guidance in increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of academic deans.

1. We need to clarify further the functions and role of the dean and develop models to guide institutions toward making the most efficient and effective use of deans in planning, evaluation, resource allocation, and other administrative functions.

2. We need to know more about what attracts individuals to the deanship and how the balance of satisfactions and dissatisfaction in office lead to the resignation of deans after a time.

3. We need to find mechanisms so that deans can maintain their scholarly interests if they are going to return to teaching later on. Research is needed to evaluate whether it is wise to plan for this cycling of deans in the future or to develop alternative models for permanent administrators whose professional development time is used to increase their administrative competence rather than to maintain their previous disciplinary competence.

4. Since teaching is the primary activity overseen by deans, we need to know much more about how they might manage resources of all kinds (including symbolic resources) to stimulate and maintain teaching excellence in their academic units.

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Administrator's Update is prepared by the ERIC Clearinghouse on Higher Education, The George Washington University, D.C. Series Editor is Glenn M. Nelson, Associate Professor of Higher Education at the University of Pittsburgh. Copies of Administrator's Update may be ordered for $1.00 each from the American Association of University Administrators, 1000 Vermont Ave., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20005. Payment must accompany all orders under $15.

This publication was prepared with funding from the National Institute of Education, U.S. Department of Education, under contract no. 400-77-0073. The opinions expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect the positions or policies of NIE or the Department.

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